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**THE UNITED STATES  
AND CENTRAL AMERICA**
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in the conservative Costa Rican press. On May 19, 1988, *La Nación*, the nation's largest paper, complained that "the immaturity, recklessness and moral inconsistency of United States officials is beating down on Central America." But despite such tensions, the United States furnished Costa Rica with \$101.8 million in aid during fiscal 1988 and continued to praise that nation as a democratic model for the rest of the hemisphere.

Relations with Guatemala were the calmest in the region. The United States provided the Cerezo administration with \$115.5 million in badly needed assistance during fiscal 1988 and gave strong verbal support to the maintenance of civilian government there. Privately, however, many Guatemalan officials believed that the failure of United States policies in Panama and Haiti played a major role in encouraging an unsuccessful right-wing coup attempt in May, 1988.

By October, 1988, United States policy in Central America seemed to have been largely cast adrift by the Reagan administration. Secretary Shultz appeared anxious to avoid mentioning Nicaragua and Assistant Secretary Abrams had apparently adopted a similar stance in relation to Panama. United States influence over friends and foes alike was declining, in part because of uncertainty as to the course of United States policies after the 1988 elections.

Despite the investment of several billion dollars, plus a great deal of energy and prestige, there were few positive, concrete results for eight years of high-level United States involvement in Central America. The Sandinistas were consolidating their position; the contras were on the verge of collapse; and the economic and political situation in El Salvador was deteriorating. True, civilian Presidents had been installed in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, but their power was severely constrained by the military, and in Guatemala the danger of a coup seemed to be growing. The effort to oust General Noriega from power in Panama had failed. Thus it seemed clear that Central America would pose major problems for the next United States administration, problems that would offer many more dangers than opportunities. ■

